

Application No: 13/4818C

Location: Sandbach County High School for Girls, Middlewich Road, Sandbach, Cheshire, CW11 3NT

Proposal: The installation of biomass boiler with ancillary plant including flue and the construction of the plan enclosure. Resubmission of 13/3444C

Applicant: Mr John Bailey, Mathieson Biomass Ltd.

Expiry Date: 08-Jan-2014

SUMMARY RECOMMENDATION

Approve subject to conditions

MAIN ISSUES

Principle

Design

Amenity

REASON FOR REFERRAL

The application is being referred to Southern Planning Committee due to call in by Councillor Moran ; *"In view of the continued public interest and concern with this unusual application, it is considered that there are a number of key issues that should be debated and tested against appropriate policies by the Planning Committee, in particular those relating to policies GR6 and GR8, as follows:*

- 1. Adverse impact on the amenity to nearby residents, including excessive operating noise levels from the boiler and extraction equipment, along with the resultant disturbance and harm;*
- 2. Detrimental impact on amenity, again to nearby residents, due to the proximity of the flue/stack to nearby houses;*
- 3. Re-assurance that the emissions from a large scale wood burning boiler would not be excessive and not cause harm through environmental disturbance and/or pollution;*
- 4. That the flue/stack height is adequate to allow proper dispersal of emissions and pollutants, and allowing for the existing roof top plant and telecoms mast;*
- 5. Re-assurance that large volumes of fuel storage, delivery arrangements, ash removal and*

resultant dust will not cause issues and harm to residents and pets.”

DESCRIPTION OF SITE AND CONTEXT

The application relates to Sandbach County High School (for Girls) that is situated to the north of Middlewich Road, the main route leading out to the west out of Sandbach. The school site is situated within the Settlement Zone and the site is a protected area of open space/recreational facility by way of policy RC2 of the Congleton Borough Local Plan. Residential properties predominantly bound the application site to the north, south, east and west. The nearest dwellings would be approximately 70 metres to the west and south.

DETAILS OF PROPOSAL

The application relates to the installation of a biomass boiler with ancillary plant including flue and the construction of the plant enclosure. The proposed boiler and plant within an enclosed space within the school complex and would be positioned towards the southern boundary of the school site to Middlewich Road. The boiler would be a combustion chamber made from fireproof ceramic with a 2-zone step grate, manufactured from solid cast chromium steel with fully automated combustion unit ash removal; fully insulated boiler casing, vertical heat exchanger with automatic mechanical cleaning. It would use wood pellets for fuel.

The boiler itself would be 4.735 metres long, 1.375 metres wide and 1.977 metres high. The boiler is to be contained within a purpose built enclosure with the following construction: blockwork walls 100 mm thick; single ply membrane roof with 18 mm moisture resistant plywood; and louvred access doors to south elevation (assumed no acoustic attenuation). The flue would be 0.3 metres in diameter and 15 metres in height would therefore project visibly 5.85 metres above the present roof height of the school.

This application is a resubmission of 13/3444C that was withdrawn to enable further discussions with Environmental Health Officers.

POLICIES

National Planning Policy

National Planning Policy Framework

Congleton Borough Local Plan First Review 2005

GR1 (New Development)

GR2 (Design)

GR6 (Amenity and Health)

RC2 (Protected Areas of open Space)

CONSULTATIONS (External to Planning)

Environmental Health: No objection subject to the submitted noise mitigation, and a 15 metre flue height with associated conditions; and a limit on hours of construction and deliveries.

VIEWS OF TOWN COUNCIL

Unless the Council can provide expert opinion giving assurance that both noise and air pollution will be no greater than the levels from existing system, Members object to the proposal. Members expressed serious concern that delivery of large quantities of fuel required for the boiler will add to existing traffic problems on Middlewich Road, and be a risk to school and leisure centre users.

OTHER REPRESENTATIONS

8 letters of objection and a petition of objection with over 80 signatures to the proposal that raise the following;

- Noise and disturbance caused by boiler itself and more HGV visits to the site.
- Visual intrusion of an industrial flue in a residential area and out of character for school.
- Pollution by way of particles and emissions located only 70 metres from residential houses.
- Height of flue insufficient to disperse pollution.
- Health & Safety risk to students at the school.

The full contents of these representations are available to view on the Council's website.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Noise Assessment
Emissions Assessment

OFFICER APPRAISAL

Principle of Development

The school site falls within the Sandbach Settlement Zone Line and the proposed development would be situated within the Settlement Zone Line. The site is also designated as an area of protected open space under Local Plan policy RC2 (Protected Areas of Open Space). This policy allows for the development or extension of existing buildings associated with the use of the site, provided that there would be no significant loss of a recreational facility involved or where it would allow for improved facilities on site which would offset any loss the proposal would comply with policy RC2 (Protected Areas of Open Space).

There is some synergy between renewable energy and sustainability in locating such a use; a use that is intended to serve the school. The proposal is broadly supported in paragraphs 97 and 98 of the NPPF that seeks to *"help increase the use and supply of renewable and low carbon energy, local planning authorities should recognise the responsibility on all communities to contribute to energy generation from renewable or low carbon sources."* However, this would depend on the fuel being from a renewable source. The NPPF states applications should be approved *"if its impacts are (or can be made) acceptable."*

The key local considerations in the determination of the application is therefore whether or not the proposal complies with Local Plan policies GR1 (New Development), GR2 (Design) and GR6 (Amenity and Health).

Design

The existing school complex includes a range of buildings of a functional character. The proposed development functional by nature and only the slim flue would be readily visible. In design terms therefore, it is the view that the proposal would be acceptable having regard to Local Plan policies GR1 (New Development) and GR2 (Design).

Amenity

Clearly the main issue that has led to strong local opposition is concern regarding noise, and more specifically prospective air pollution. The technical detail and nature of the proposed use and the location, the scale of the development and the hours of operation has been rigorously assessed by the Environmental Health Officer.

The Environmental Health Officer is satisfied that the Applicant has addressed concerns in the previous application by increasing the height of the flue. On this basis there would be such a detrimental impact to neighbouring residential amenity to justify refusal as the noise would sit within current ambient noise levels and the emissions would be effectively dispersed. Thus, there are no planning reasons to resist permission.

As such, the scheme should not have a material impact on neighbouring residential amenity over and above the existing noise or emissions environment. The proposal would comply therefore with Local Plan Policy GR6 (Amenity and Health).

CONCLUSIONS

It is considered that the application proposes an acceptable form of development. On the basis of the very thorough analysis carried out by the EHO, in this context it is unlikely to overly impact on neighbouring residential (by issues of noise, disturbance or emissions) and visual amenity. Therefore, it is considered that the proposal is in accordance with the relevant policies of the Development Plan and is therefore recommended for approval.

RECOMMENDATION - Approve

CONDITIONS

1. Full.
2. Approved Plans.
3. Hours of deliveries.
4. Hours of construction.
5. Stack height.
6. Boiler installation.
7. Boiler operation.
8. Notification of change of fuel.
9. Method of fuel delivery.

10. Maintenance schedule.
11. Operation agreement
12. Alterations to the maintenance schedule subject to notification.
13. Smoke emissions.
14. Noise mitigation scheme.

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